

My Immortal

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Summary: A cub called Tara – obsessed with Gothic culture – is granted special powers by an alien entity, and uses this new gift to reshape the world as she sees fit...

***Chapter 1*: Chapter 1: Zazu the Teacher**

AN: Wow. Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow. It's been eight days. Eight days – *eight days* – since I've last posted a story. Whoa. Eight *days*! I bet you've missed me. Either that or you've all been throwing secret parties to celebrate my long absence.

Well, here's the new story. You know, there was once a notorious story on this website. A story that was so bad that it kills anyone brave enough to read it. Okay, so maybe it wasn't *that* bad, but it's still pretty infamous. So, uh, I'm going to make fun of it. Enjoy!

Seriously, though. *Eight days*!

My Immortal

Chapter One: Zazu the Teacher

Zazu sighed, putting a wing to his face. "Okay, let's go over this one more time," he said. "If I had a mango, and you had a mango, then how many mangos would that be altogether?"

Pori just stared at Zazu, smiling. "I like mangos!"

It took all of Zazu's strength for him not to tear his feathers out. "Oh, we're not getting anywhere," he sighed. "It's simply impossible to educate you. You're always focusing on something completely different! You have the attention span of a goldfish – and that's not a lot!"

Pori was busy staring at a butterfly that had landed on her beak. "Don't butterflies look like bees sometimes?" she asked. "Only without the stingers. Hey, did you know that when bees sting you, they die? Isn't that funny?"

"To me, it's rather morbid," Zazu replied, sitting down beside Pori. "Nature can be cruel – all the time, in my case. Unfortunately, that's the way life is. Maybe that's why I'm doomed to living in this disgusting pit of wretchedness. Maybe the Outlands is finally where I belong."

"Oh, Zoom, it'll all work out for you in the end," Pori told him. "Maybe if you weren't so bad at your job then you'd probably still have it."

"I wasn't bad at my job!" Zazu protested. "It's just that my father's killer was causing me severe stress, and I accidentally ended up insulting the King! Anyone could have made such a mistake. In my opinion, the King should learn to accept sincere apologies."

"You could try a different job," Pori suggested. "What are you good at?"

"Careful attention to detail," Zazu responded. "I've analysed the Pride Lands countless times, and it's all amounted to nothing. Is this what five years of hard work leads to? Why, I ought to storm right in there and give the King a piece of my mind!"

"Oh, you don't want to do that, Zen," Pori said. "Wouldn't taking a piece of your mind out of your head really hurt? It could kill you."

"Pori, it was a figure of speech," said Zazu. "Although maybe bashing myself on the head repeatedly would be the right thing to do. Death could actually be a blessed release. Pori, would you mind beating me to death?"

"I couldn't do that," Pori replied. "I'm too nice. Besides, if I killed you, then who would I have to talk to? No one. And that just means I'd be standing here. All on my own. Come to think of it, that's actually pretty horrible."

"I suppose so," Zazu agreed. "Having a companion – even a completely inept one such as you – is much more beneficial to being by one's own self. Maybe you arriving here was actually a good thing."

"Zena, I'm the best thing that's ever happened to you," said Pori.

"This has to be the worst time of my life," Zazu sighed, sliding to the ground. "I don't believe it. It's times like this when I wish I could just change the whole world. Make it so that I'm the centre of attention. That would be the greatest gift of them all."

"Isn't it a lovely day?" Simba exclaimed as he walked out of the den. "Blue skies, green grass, and parents trying to have

you killed!"

"I thought he was being too happy," said Haiba, casually examining his claws. "You fight mermaids, insane camp counsellors, the Interceptor, and there's still always some kind of problem."

"Can you really blame the guy?" said Nala. "I mean, if my mother tried to kill me, then I'd be pretty worried. Simba, what's up?"

"It's confusing," Simba said. "My parents just aren't making any sense. I can't figure it out, because nothing adds up. First they send me away, then they want me dead, and..." He groaned. "It makes my brain hurt."

"Well, here's a cheerful fact: did you know that the common gnat only lives for two hours, but in its brief life it kisses 169 times?" said Haiba. "I think that's quite extraordinary."

"Sure it is," sighed Simba. "Look, the point I'm trying to make is that this is one big mystery – and it's obviously leading up to something big. My parents want me dead for a reason, right? It's all about finding out what that reason is."

"Maybe they're just tired of your saving the day all the time," mused Haiba, "and now they're insanely jealous, so they decide to try and have you killed. There we go. Case closed."

"That's too simple," said Simba, shaking his head. "Deep down, there's gotta be a bit of love *somewhere* for me. I'd say they were hypnotised."

"Last time I checked, *you're* the one who gets hypnotised all the time," said Nala. "You're way too easy, that's your problem. Even when you think you've hypnotised other people, you're still being hypnotised yourself."

"Well, that's certainly confusing," said Haiba. "But do they even *sound* hypnotised? They're not exactly walking around the place like mindless zombies, or saying, 'pretty, pretty, shiny, shiny' all the time."

"That's where I'm out of ideas," Simba said. "They're just not giving anything away. My parents act like nothing has happened. They act as if they don't even care about me! And that just makes me really mad!" His shoulders sagged, defeated. "I give up. This isn't going anywhere."

"Don't worry, Simba," said Nala, putting a paw on his shoulder. "We'll figure it out one day. We just... need more clues. For a start: who the heck is controlling your parents?"

"Are there any enemies that we don't know anything about?" Haiba asked, curious.

"I don't think so," said Simba, shaking his head. "They're either dead or too scared to ever come back here. It's rare that one of them ever comes back to settle the score."

"What about Hago?" Nala asked. "He came back. And Scar. And—"

"Okay, okay, I get it," Simba interrupted. "But until whoever's behind this decided to show themselves, I don't know a thing." He sighed. "Sometimes I wish I could just change the world so that this never happened – and my parents were still normal."

"No one could ever have a power like that," said Haiba. "It would make you a monster."

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Psycho Analysis

Chapter Two: Psycho Analysis

Tara was insane.

There was no doubt about that. She was just insane. Wrong in the head. A twisted soul. Whatever you wanted to call it, it all boiled down to the one simple fact that she had well and truly lost her mind.

"I just don't understand it," said Tara's mother, Akili.

"Neither do I," Tara's father, Mkali, agreed.

Tara had a reputation in her pride for being very unusual. That is, she was so insane that she liked to whenever she had the chance to. Right now, she was busy smearing the blood of a dead antelope all over a tree trunk, concentrating on it—as if it actually *meant* something.

"Um, Tara, what are you doing?" Akili asked.

Tara turned to face her parents. She was a medium-sized cub, with grey fur covering her entire body, and hard brown eyes that seemed to bore into you. "What are you doing here, preps? Stop flaming me!"

That was Tara-speak for "Get out, you freaks. Stop annoying me!"

"Tara," Mkali began, "we're concerned that you're acting a little out of sorts here in the pride. Can we ask just *why* you're smearing the innards of last night's leftovers on that tree over there?"

"It's important!" Tara exclaimed, turning back to the tree and rubbing her face in the blood. "Now, go away, preps. Stop flaming me!"

"We don't know what that means!" Akili yelled, nearly going mad herself at how irritating her daughter could be.

"Now, now, dear, let me handle this," said Mkali, before taking a step towards Tara. "Tara... tell me something: why do you do this? Your mother and I are worried sick. Ever since you were born, you've always seemed very... different."

"Obviously," remarked Akili flatly, staring at the blood on the tree.

"We need to know, Tara," Mkali insisted. "Why do you do this? Tell us. Please."

Tara just stared at her father like she could see right through him. As if he wasn't even there. "What? Just get out, and stop flaming me!"

"I swear, if she keeps saying that, then I really *will* set her on fire," Akili mumbled. "Come on, Mkali. It's obvious that there's no getting through to her."

Mkali sighed, turning away from his daughter and heading back over to Akili. "I'm concerned," he told his mate.

"We've been concerned ever since she was born," said Akili. "Remember? When she jumped right out at you and tried to bite your neck off?"

"Okay, then I'm *very* concerned," he amended himself. "Look, from what we've seen, this is only going to get worse."

"What do you mean?" Akili asked.

"Well... what about when Tara grows up?" Mkali wondered. "What will she be like in two or three years' time? She could start *killing* other members of the pride, for all we know."

"So, you're saying that—"

"—she's dangerous, yes," Mkali finished. "It seems to me that the only option left is to... well, to banish her."

Akili gasped. "Oh, Mkali, we can't do that. What in the world would everyone think of us? We'd be terrible parents."

"But we're *not* terrible parents," Mkali retorted. "We've just got a terrible *daughter*, that's all. Think about it. We've tried our best. Got the most help possible for her. But still she refuses to listen. Every day she's always... eating the guts of a dead animal or... trying to break her own neck in an attempt to reach the 'Gods of Death' or whatever the heck she

means. We simply can't go on living like this. It's no use. Our daughter, I'm afraid to say, is beyond repair."

"But that'd be like killing her," Akili protested. "If we left her all the way out in the desert, then she would starve to death in a matter of days. You know she can't look after herself properly. That's why we've had to suffer for the past year and a half."

"I know, dear, I know," Mkali sympathised, "but it's just going to be bad for our own health if we keep Tara in our care. The load has simply become too much for us to bear. Don't you agree with me?"

Akili nodded slightly. "I suppose you're right," she finally agreed, "but how are we going to break the news to her?"

"We don't *have* to," was Mkali's response. "Her mind simply wouldn't be able to process what we're doing to her anyway. She's far too insane to understand anything but her own, psychotic little world she's invented."

"So we just grab her and stick her in the desert?" asked Akili.

Mkali shrugged. "That's all we can do. Unless you want to try and get her to run away herself," he said. "But I doubt you'll be trying that with a cub like her any time soon."

"I still hear preps!" Tara called in a singsong voice from the blood-spattered tree.

"Not for long, dear..." Mkali sighed, slowly advancing towards his daughter. "Not for long..."

"I can't believe you're doing this to me!" Tara yelled as her parents threw her into the middle of the desert. "You preps! All you do is flame me, all the time! Keep acting like this and I'll stop talking!"

"Oh, please do," Akili moaned. "There's only so much more I can take before I pull my fur out!"

"Now, now, dear, let's not insult our... beloved daughter," said Mkali. "After all, this is the last time we are going to be seeing her."

Akili could have danced for joy, but she decided to contain her excitement. "Yes, you're absolutely right, dear," she agreed. "Goodbye, Tara. We wish you a happy starvation – I mean life. We wish you a happy life. Yes, that's right."

"Yes. Goodbye." Mkali whispered in his mate's ear. "Let's get out of here."

"Right behind you."

And just like that, they zipped away from their daughter as fast as they could, leaving her all on her own to fend for herself in the desert.

Knowing Tara, no one else would have argued with that.

Except herself, of course. "Stupid preps," she mumbled, kicking up some sand with her paws. "It's just because they're jealous that I'm the most important in the world, like, ever! They're just stupid. I'm the smartest person on earth. They don't understand how great and cool I am."

Tara took a few steps forward, when she suddenly felt something very squishy underneath her paws. "Stupid preps," she said, "leaving stuff here."

She looked down to see that she had stepped in some kind of oozing, black liquid. For some reason, it appeared to look like it was *alive*.

"What have these lame preps left—"

Before Tara had a chance to say anything more, the black liquid jumped right into her mouth, and proceeded to force its way down her throat. Her tiny brain wasn't at all able to comprehend what was happening to her. She didn't know what the liquid was doing to her body.

She didn't know the powers it had granted her.

Tara gasped as she fell onto her back, her heart pounding so fast that it felt like her head was going to explode.

Tara... a faint voice spoke in her head.

"What...?" Tara asked, slowly getting up. "Who's there? Another lame prep?"

Tara... the voice continued. I can help you...

"Help me?" said Tara. "I don't need help from preps like you. Now where the heck are you, sicko?"

I am... inside you... the voice replied. I can feel... everything... that you feel.

"Who are you, you weirdo?" Tara demanded. "Stop flaming my mind!"

My name... is Inque, said the voice. Now, tell me... what makes you angry, Tara?

"Everything!" Tara exclaimed. "All those preps running the world! I hate them! I'm so cool and great, but they don't understand that! Now stop asking questions, prep! I don't want to answer them!"

Would you like to... destroy them? the voice offered.

Tara thought for a moment. "Yes," she decided. "Yes, I do."

Then we shall... begin.

AN: Oh, dear. Evil liquid takes control of the most selfish, idiotic cub on the planet. Now that's a recipe you *don't* want to eat! Unless you're into that sort of thing, of course. If you do, then you should immediately seek medical help.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: A Marking of Blood

AN: Argh! First I vanish for eight days, and then my computer decides to mess with me. This is getting ridiculous. I feel cursed. Probably stepped on a crack or something. Anyway, here's two fresh chapters for you.

StonedMonkey1: Ah, yes, the symbiote. Can't say *Spider-Man* doesn't influence me. Love that guy. Saw *The Amazing Spider-Man* recently, actually. Good – but not as good as the originals, in my opinion.

the-mysterious-other: Ah, so you spotted the Inque creature from *Birdie Gone Bad* in my other series. Clever little you. But does the Inque have takeover planned like it did for Blu, or is it something different this time...?

Chapter Three: A Marking of Blood

"You know, if there's one thing I really find quite weird, then it's blood," Simba said. "It's gotta be the most noticeable thing in the world. It just stares right out at you. You can't help but look at it."

Nala stared at him. "That's... very poetic, Simba. I hope you're not gonna be saying stuff like that all the time when you grow up."

Simba, Nala and Haiba were staring at a tree, smeared with the blood of what they presumed belonged to some poor, deceased animal. "Who do you think's done this?" Haiba wondered. "Some sicko with a demented interest in art? You know, the type of people who look at a splattered bug all over the ground and think it means something."

"I seriously doubt that," Simba responded. "Last time I checked, there aren't any weird artists in the Pride Lands. However, there are a lot of evil – and powerful – villains who like to poke their noses around the place, and—"

"—you think that they put the blood on this tree," Nala finished for him. "I don't understand why anyone evil would do that. What are they trying to prove?"

"They're crazy," Simba replied. "Stuff like that makes sense to them. Hey – maybe it's a warning to stay away."

"Stay away from where?" Nala asked. "Where we live? Somehow, I don't think anyone's gonna follow up on that. It's probably just an accident, anyway. Some wildebeest hurt itself and died right next to a tree, that's all."

"Then where's the body?" Haiba asked.

"Uh..." Nala shrugged. "It became part of the Circle of Life?" she suggested half-heartedly.

"Oh, that's quick, all right," said Haiba. "It *always* takes a body, like, two minutes to decompose."

"Okay, so maybe it *is* a warning," Nala admitted. "I don't understand why anyone would be warning us in *blood*, though."

"Well, this may seem a little gross, but... You know what, just cover your eyes or something," Haiba walked over to the tree, extended one of his claws and scooped up a little bit of the blood on the tree. He licked it off, tasting it thoughtfully. "Salty. Thick. Few little bits in it. Definitely antelope blood."

Nala was disgusted. "That is so sick in a way I can't even describe. Did I ever mention that you're completely insane?"

"The three of us are insane, Nala," Haiba retorted. "Think about it. We do all these crazy things and hardly anyone even believes us. Well, aside from a select few like Tiny Tojo and his majestic girlfriend."

"Just what is your problem with Tojo?" Simba asked.

"A guy like that getting a girl like her?" he said. "They go together like a mammoth and a molehog. It just doesn't happen."

"Whatever," said Nala. "I still think you're insane."

"Be grateful that I'm on your side, then," Haiba retorted. "Well, at least you know where the blood came from. Judging from the staleness, it's a little over an hour old. So whoever killed the antelope has come and gone – which is unfortunate, because now the guy that did it is going to be a little difficult to track."

"Wouldn't a super sense of smell be useful right now?" said Simba. "So... how exactly do we track a blood-obsessed weirdo down?"

"Well, the initial idea would be to check for paw prints," Haiba replied, looking around. "But... I can't see any."

"Brilliant!" Nala said sarcastically, throwing her forepaws up in the air. "First thing to check for, and it's not here! Hey, you don't think the guy's invisible, do you?"

"If I had invisibility powers, then I could think of many more interesting things to do with my time than smear antelope blood over trees," Haiba responded. "Like... spying on girls. *That* is what I call exciting."

"Yeah, well, some of us aren't as messed up as you, Haiba," Simba muttered, walking away from the tree. "Sometimes I'd go as far to say that you had a thing for your own mother at one point."

Haiba narrowed his eyes. "How did you know that?"

"I'm pretending you didn't just say that," said Nala. "Otherwise I'm going to throw up all night."

"Well, there aren't many things that make me sick," Haiba said. "Once you've seen as many things as I have, your stomach kind of becomes used to it. I don't think I've *ever* thrown up, actually. Well, except for that date with the hippo, but can you really blame me?"

Simba made his way up a small hill, and his eyes widened in horror at what he saw. "Oh, boy..." He turned back to Nala and Haiba. "Guys, you have to see this. It's, uh... quite weird."

Nala and Haiba joined him on either side. "Oh, that is not good..." Haiba said, frowning. "That isn't good at all."

Nala shared the same reaction. "That's just impossible..."

The three cubs were staring at a field filled with a few trees. However, the trees had all been smeared with more antelope blood, and the grass was black. Blacker than the night itself. So were the leaves on the trees. It looked as if everything had been totally burned to a crisp.

"Okay, this is serious now," Nala said. "Like, 'I've just broken up with Simba' serious."

"You're breaking up with me?" Simba exclaimed, looking at Nala with pure worry in his eyes.

"No, no, I'm not breaking up with you. Still love my cuddly wuddly Simba," she said, smiling at him.

"Aw, isn't that sweet?" said Haiba. "Look, when you're finished with your fluffy moment, then can we please get on with the hero work? Oh, I know. Why don't we follow the trail of black grass until we find the evil mastermind who wants to burn this whole pride to a cinder?"

"It's not burnt, though," Simba said, hurrying over to the grass and sniffing it. "It's... just black. Nothing's really happened except for the colour being changed. Now *that* is what I call weird."

"But I don't understand," said Nala, standing next to Simba. "That means that someone wants to change the colour of the grass just for the sake of it. Why would anyone want to do that?"

"Severe depression?" Haiba suggested with a shrug. "Happens quite often with cubs. Loneliness, neglect, heartbreak. One of the many problems that come with cubhood."

"Experienced them all," Simba replied, "which means you might be right. Maybe someone's changed the colour of the grass to... show their emotions. Like a... picture of what's going on in their head."

"But how?" Nala wondered. "You can't just go about changing the colour of grass whenever you want to. Life doesn't work like that."

"Unless you have magical powers," Haiba retorted. "I wonder if Tama and Tojo have broken up? Maybe she's gone on a kingdom-altering rampage."

"If she were still evil," Nala said. "Believe me, I've had more than my fair share of bruises from the girl, but she's not like that anymore."

"So this is someone new," Simba decided. "Well, there's a surprise. Doesn't matter, though. Should be easy enough to find if they keep doing this all of the time. You never know. This could be an easy day for us."

"Since when are *any* of our days easy?" Haiba asked. "I mean, just yesterday we ended up fighting a giant mud monster who wanted to suck all of our blood so it could have a real body."

"It wasn't so bad," Simba said. "Well, *after* we cleaned up the mud."

***Chapter 4*: Chapter 4: Gift of the Inque**

Chapter Four: Gift of the Inque

Tara was thoroughly enjoying the pleasurable experience that this... Inque creature – she assumed it was a creature – had provided for her. The powers... they were amazing. She had never felt anything like it before. She had so many ideas for this world. And all of them would be implemented.

How do you... feel, Tara? it asked in her head. *Are you... pleased?*

The new creature that Tara had swallowed seemed to be probing and poking at every part of her mind. Like it was conducting some form of research. Trying to learn everything it could about Tara. Not that there was much to learn, of course. Just all of the psychotic, demented thoughts she had on a daily basis.

"Of course I'm pleased, you prep!" Tara yelled as she stood in the middle of the field, staring at the trees and grass that she had turned completely black. She hated anything that was happy and colourful. Everything needed to become the same. All black. It all needed to be depressing.

Tara was obsessed with pain and death. The mere sight of blood fascinated her on a level that no one could even understand. She felt compelled to spread it all over the place – hence the antelope blood on the trees. As if there was some kind of... unearthly presence directing her forward for a greater purpose.

Of course, Tara never decided to elaborate on this. She just simply wasn't smart enough. She didn't have the intelligence to realise that she was part of a much bigger plan. She wasn't clever enough to realise that this Inque creature wanted so much more than just to help her with her sadistic deeds...

Tara... what has to be done next? the Inque asked. *What is it that you... desire?*

The Inque always spoke slowly. As if it was only just learning how to speak. But the longer it spent in Tara's mind, the more coherent it seemed. Maybe it truly *was* learning from her brain...

"I'm going to make all of those ugly preps just like me!" Tara exclaimed, a grin slowly spreading across her face. "Make them realise just how important it is to be depressed all the time! It's about time they saw the... happiness in the... depression."

You wish to... The Inque seemed to pause for thought. *Make the rest of this kingdom like you?*

"Duh!" Tara snapped. "Did you think I came all the way out here to this preppy place just so I could change the colour of the trees?" She frowned. "Well, yes, I did – but that's not the point now. We have to see the bigger picture! We can make this whole pride into my new palace of doom!"

Yes, Tara, the Inque agreed. *With my help, you can... change the whole world if you... want to.*

"The whole world?" Tara's eyes widened at the prospect. What if the whole world was just like her? What if they all appreciated the pain and darkness deep down in her soul? It would be the greatest gift anyone could give her. Whatever this Inque was... she loved it.

Yes, Tara... the whole world, and everything in it. Every plant, every drop of water, and every creature. I can give it all to you. Wouldn't you want that?

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes! All of the pathetic preps will finally listen to me!" Tara ranted, throwing herself up against a blackened tree. "They will all appreciate my genius! I will become the smartest organic life form in the universe!"

Tara's mouth snapped shut at that. That wasn't... *her* speaking. She wasn't smart enough to say anything of that calibre. "What... what was that? I didn't say that! That's what preps say!"

Are you not pleased with the intelligence I have supplied you with? the Inque asked. *I have made you smarter. Increased the power of your tiny mind. Don't you feel so much better now?*

Tara closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. It was like her insignificant, puny mind had been opened up to its full potential. It was flowing with knowledge and intelligence and... power. Lots and lots of power. So much that she felt this exhilarating feeling. Her body felt as if it were tingling. She knew so much now...

And she could use it all to change the world. Everyone and everything would become like her. And if there was anything she *didn't* like, then she would deal with it. *Destroy* it. Make sure that it never bothered her again.

With the Inque, she was unstoppable.

Simba leant towards one of the blackened trees, sniffing it deeply. "I think... we might have been wrong," he said, turning to Nala and Haiba.

"What?" Nala narrowed her eyes at the tree. "What do you mean, we're wrong?"

"Just colour change," he muttered, looking the tree over. "But I can smell... something. Something really... faint. Like it's far away."

"What's it smell like?" Haiba asked, putting a paw to the blackened tree. It didn't feel weak or burnt. Not damaged in the slightest. It was just black. He sniffed the trunk. "Just smells like leaves to me."

"No, but there's something... else," he detected. "Like a sort of... hot smell. Like this tree is somehow... *warm*."

"Warm?" Haiba groped the tree. "Doesn't feel that warm. Although then again *everything* is warm around here. You sure you're haven't caught a cold, Simba?"

Simba put his ear up to the tree. "There's something odd about this tree, but I can't quite put a claw on it. This tree feels warm to me, but... only a tiny, *tiny* bit. Like... like it's been changed just a little bit."

"You mean like its appearance?" said Nala. "As in, the colour? Doesn't that count as a slight change, because—"

"—nothing else *but* the colour has been changed," Haiba concluded. "That's clever. There are some dark forces at work here, aren't there?"

Nala stared out into the horizon, shielding her eyes with a paw. "Looks like the colour change goes on for a while," she noticed. "All the way to the outskirts, by the looks of things."

"In my experience, don't all the psychos like to come *into* the Pride Lands rather than walk *away* from them?" asked Haiba, perplexed. "This is making my head spin."

"Yeah, so..." Nala thought for a second. "Shocker."

Simba and Haiba stared at Nala. "Shocker?" they both exclaimed.

"But he died," said Haiba.

"No, no, no, I don't mean it *is* Shocker doing this," Nala told them, "but I'm thinking about how you found him when he kidnapped me. He left tracks. Like Haiba said – paw prints. Well, this is it, isn't it? This is a trail. A trail for us – or *anyone* – to follow."

"Like a trap," said Haiba. "It's gotta be a trap, hasn't it? Whoever likes to change the colour of their trees also likes luring innocent cubs to their deaths."

"But how would you even kill someone?" Nala wondered. "You can't *change* someone to death. And if you had the power to change the world, then would you just go around changing the appearance of things?"

"No," said Simba, suddenly becoming very concerned. "You could change *lives*."

"Oh, brilliant," said Haiba, taking a few steps across the 'trail'. "So this is a trap to change other animals? Whoever's done this really has a weird plan. You could almost say it was completely stupid."

"It's always the stupid ones," said Simba, "who turn out to be the most dangerous."

AN: Can you paint with all the colours of the wind? Obviously Tara can't, otherwise she wouldn't have turned everything completely black. That Inque creature works in mysterious ways...

Hopefully you'll have two more chapters tomorrow, if my computer doesn't decide to get clever with me again...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: A Shock to the Head

AN: I'm a very patient guy. You know that. But this is just ridiculous. This story has been plunged into so much hell that I don't even know if it'll be finished before the end of the decade. Seriously, something keeps going wrong. It's all my computer's fault. Oddly enough, it started to break down when I decided to write a book. Too afraid to try new things. That's my computer's problem.

But now, it's all sorted – hopefully – and the show must go on! Your favourite author, ThatPersonYouMightKnow, is back!

With a vengeance.

KaylaDestroyer: I had a feeling you'd catch on to that reference. I can spot an *Ice Age* fan from a mile away!

titan616: Welcome to the madness, my friend. I've been keeping up on your reviews. It's good to see that you're enjoying yourself. After all, I aim to please!

Chapter Five: A Shock to the Head

Tara embraced the power of the Inque as she walked along. It had given her so much in such a short time. As every second passed, she felt smarter and smarter. It was a gift. A gift from the heavens. Her reward for suffering all of the torment that her parents had put her through. One day they would pay dearly for their actions...

But first, this pride was going to undergo a few changes. Once she had claimed this kingdom, she could go about taking everything that surrounded it. And just keep going and going and going, until the world was just the way she wanted it to be. Only then could she be truly happy.

Tara, the Inque spoke in her head. *Where are the... beings of this land?*

Tara seemed smarter – and so did the Inque. It was almost speaking perfectly now. By the end of the day, it would be nothing *but* perfect.

Shut up, prep! Tara replied in annoyance. *Why can't you just wait a while and—*

Tara was cut off as a sudden shock invaded her head. *Zap!*

Ow! Tara blinked a few times in annoyance. For a fraction of a second, her eyes were glowing green. *I... Well, they'll be here now. I'm sure of it.*

That's better, said the Inque. *Now, Tara, you're going to listen to me and listen good. I want as many of these organic beings brought here right this instant. Do you understand me?*

Tara's eyes widened. *But I thought you were—*

Zap! Another painful shock shot up through her body, and her head twitched slightly. *You will listen to me, Tara!*

Tara stared out into space with a blank expression, her eyes glowing green. *Yes... master...*

She blinked, and then returned to her normal senses. *Time to fetch the preps*, she thought, before backtracking through the blackened landscape that she had fashioned.

"Okay," said Haiba, poking his head over the top of the hill. "There's a cub over there with glowing green eyes and a blank expression on her face. Am I the only one who thinks that's a little bit odd?"

"So *she's* being changing everything to make it look black?" asked Nala incredulously. "That seems a little farfetched to me. She looks like the stupidest cub in the world."

"And the glowing green eyes don't count why, exactly?" Haiba retorted.

Simba was concentrating hard, staring at the cub. "Looks like she's been shocked," he noticed. "She's twitching a little."

"Those eyes," said Nala, shifting uncomfortably. "It feels like she's staring right into my soul. It's freaking me out!"

"Looks like she's being controlled or something," Simba pointed out. "And... it looks like it's hurting, too."

"So that's why it looks like she's being shocked," Haiba concluded. He smiled. "Well, the 'making it up as we go along' plan is going great today, isn't it?"

"The question is, who's doing it?" Simba wondered. "Does it look like she's being controlled by anyone?" He looked around. "No one's around except for us."

"Maybe she's not being controlled at all," Haiba supposed. "She could... just be practicing a trick where her eyes glow green – and she twitches a little bit. I mean, you know how many tricks I have."

"Most of them being worthless," Nala said. "And sometimes just plain stupid. Just what was up with that one you showed us last week?"

"Oh, it wasn't that bad," said Haiba. "All I did was show you how to chase your own tail properly."

"I don't need to chase my own tail!" Nala responded. "How about a trick that just solves whatever problem we're having!"

"Oh, you'd have to be *magic* to do that," Haiba replied.

"Guys, look," said Simba, pointing at the cub stood in the black field. "Her eyes aren't glowing anymore. She just looks kind of... normal now."

"Another way of saying it isn't normal at all," Haiba said. "Cubs don't just change how their eyes glow whenever they want to. There's something wrong with that girl. Maybe she ate a Jua Stone."

"A Jua what?" asked Nala.

"A Jua Stone," Haiba repeated. "It's like a stone that just lights up in the middle of the night. Some people like to carry it around to help them see better. Although I remember it being a yellow glow. Not a green one."

"Thank you for wasting thirty seconds of my time," Simba sighed. "There's something up with this girl."

"Then why don't we go in and confront her?" asked Haiba.

"She could kill us," Simba replied. "Plus we'll give away the element of surprise. And we don't normally get that. Most of the times it's just that we're standing somewhere, the bad guy shows up, he talks a little, and then we have to wriggle out of it before he blows us up! Then there's some kind of big fight, and then—" He narrowed his eyes. "Nala's missing, isn't she?"

Haiba and Simba stared at the empty spot between them where Nala had once been. "Oh, that's just brilliant!" Simba exclaimed in annoyance. "Haiba, why weren't you watching her?"

"*Me?*" said Haiba. "I thought *you* were watching her! I was watching creepy glowing eyes girl!"

"Then where is she?" Simba asked.

"Easy. She's—" Haiba cut himself off when he saw that the cub had disappeared. "She's... gone."

"Gee, I wonder who took her?" Simba said sarcastically. "There goes the element of surprise." He frowned. "*Again.*"

"Oh, it's not like Nala can take care of herself," said Haiba, getting to his paws. "Unless there's some form of mind control involved. Then she's completely doomed." He chuckled. "But that would never happen. It's about as likely as you being prone to hypnosis, Simba."

Simba just stared at Haiba. "You're mocking me, aren't you?"

Haiba simply smiled. "Wouldn't dream of it, Simba. After all, aren't you just purr-fect?" he teased. "You look really cute when you sleep, you know what? Like a baby. Especially since you still suck on your paw."

"Hey! Stop watching me sleep!" he exclaimed, cheeks turning red. "What I do when sleeping is my own business! Not yours!"

"Shall we just go and rescue Nala?" Haiba suggested, walking down the hill. "Somehow I don't think that you'd like her with glowing green eyes. And then she just might hypnotise *you*, slave-cub."

A dreamy look crossed Simba's face as Haiba disappeared. "Oh, she hypnotised me a long time ago..." he muttered with a smile, before following him.

"So, if you had glowing green eyes," said Haiba, "then what would your evil plan be? To... spread the... glowiness?"

"Either that or total control over the entire world," Simba responded.

"Why does everyone want to do that?" Haiba wondered. "They always want the world."

"Well, think about it," replied Simba. "If you had the power, then wouldn't you go crazy for more?"

"So the problem is that no one's ever satisfied?" Haiba concluded. "Well, that's great. Looks like we're doing this job for the rest of our lives."

Unless I quit, Simba silently retorted. He stared out into the horizon, but couldn't see any sign of Nala or the cub with the glowing eyes. "Oh, man, this is weird," he said. "How have they just disappeared? Don't tell me she can vanish whenever she wants to!"

"She's gotta have some kind of power," Haiba decided. "Like... maybe she can blend into the environment at will. Like a chameleon. I bet that's what she calls herself. The Chameleon. How cheesy."

"Haiba, you're the master at being cheesy," said Simba. "Since when does it ever matter for you?"

"It doesn't," he replied. "I just... think it's cheesy. I don't mind it when someone's cheesy. I *love* cheesiness!"

"Come on." Simba urged Haiba to walk faster. "We've gotta find Nala before it's too late."

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: The Monster Inside

Chapter Six: The Monster Inside

"Oh, you are a dirty prep, you are," Tara said, staring down at the cream-furred cub sitting on the ground in front of her. She looked like a feisty one, all right. "You'll be just perfect for my sneaky, despicable evil plan." She suddenly looked confused. "Why do I keep talking like that?"

Nala wasn't impressed. "So you're Mrs Wacko-Glow," she said, staring hard at Tara. "Care to explain how you're doing it?"

"Shut up, prep," Tara spat, raising a paw as if she was about to strike Nala across the face. "Or you'll regret it."

"Believe me, *girl*, if you try to use those claws then I'll make sure that you're *eating* them five seconds later," Nala threatened. "Now, just what the heck do you want from me?"

"I need you to become like me," Tara replied. "You are going to—"

Zap! Nala's eyes widened as a sudden shock seemed to jolt through Tara's body. She twitched slightly, and her eyes began to glow a luminous green again. "Well, *this* is weird..."

Tara stared straight ahead, as if she were hypnotised. Her mouth slowly opened – almost mechanically – and began to speak.

However, her voice sounded very different, and much more terrifying. It was Tara's voice, although a much more distorted version. "*I... I... I...*"

An icy chill cut through Nala's body. Despite the hot temperature of the day, she felt the coldest she had in a long while. "Okay... *really* weird."

"*I... I... I...*" Tara's eyes continued to glow green. Whatever was speaking through her – Nala assumed that it definitely wasn't Tara talking – it seemed as if it was trying to learn. Like it was trying to observe and absorb all that was around it. "*I... are... I... an... I... am Inque.*"

Nala watched with fear and fascination as the creature – yes, it was definitely a creature – inside Tara adjusted to its surroundings. "*I... will... feast.*"

Feast? thought Nala worriedly. *That doesn't sound too good.* Slowly and cautiously getting to her paws, Nala kept her eyes trained directly on Tara, so not to arouse any kind of suspicion. "What do you want?"

"*Need...*" Tara made a strange gagging sound, as if the creature inside was struggling on its next word. "*Need... bodies.*"

Whatever this Inque thing was, it worried Nala. It wanted bodies. Forms of life. But what for? "Why do you need bodies?" she asked, hoping that she wouldn't become its first – or second, if Tara was counted – victim.

"*Power...*" the Inque creature rasped. "*Need... power... Race... weak... Need... life...*"

"Where are you from?" Nala questioned. She glanced behind, and could only see fields stretching out into the distance. It wasn't clear whether she'd have a decent chance of evading this thing by running away. Then again, it *did* say it was weak...

"*Far... away,*" the Inque replied. "*Not... of this... earth.*"

Nala didn't understand what that meant, but this certainly wasn't a creature from around these parts. "Okay... so you need bodies. Okay. I can live with that. Sort of. But... why me? I mean, why am I so special?"

She slowly backed away, ready to make a run for it. She had to get out of here before this thing sucked out her mind – or worse.

"*You... have no... significance... cub,*" the Inque said.

Nala raised an eyebrow. *Gee, thanks,* she thought flatly. It was enough that this thing had decided to kidnap her, but now it was only because she was there? *I really feel special now.*

"*You will... surrender,*" the Inque told her. "*You... will... give in.*"

Nala frowned. "I don't think so," she said—

—and then bolted away as fast as she could, not looking back once. That thing wasn't getting its... whatever the heck it had on her body. She'd rather die.

Meanwhile, stood fixed to the spot, was Tara. Her eyes stopped glowing, and she blinked a few times, snapping out of it. "Oh..." Putting a paw to her head, she sank to the ground. "What was... that?"

Tara, the Inque spoke. *The... cub is getting away.*

"Stupid preps running away from me," she muttered, watching as Nala disappeared into the distance. "But she won't get far."

Find her... the Inque instructed. *I need the body.*

Haiba stared up at the sky, and wondered how long it would be before night arrived on the scene. "Looks like a full moon tonight," he said to Simba, who was walking alongside him. "That's never good. Too many monsters on a full moon."

Simba looked stressed beyond belief. "Oh, why do I do this?" he moaned, collapsing to the ground and burying his face in the grass. "I'm tired."

"That's not like you," said Haiba. "I thought you never gave up."

"Yeah, well..." Simba rolled onto his back, shielding his eyes from the intense glare of the sun. "I think I've been doing this for too long. It'll probably kill me by the time I become the King."

"You'd make a good king now," Haiba told him. "Of course, I'm supposed to be a king one day, but I've kinda quit on that happening. I think I'll just remain a free cub. Who needs responsibilities like that when you've got enough already, huh?"

Simba sighed. "Guess you're right," he said. "I could just give up everything altogether, and have fun all the time. Leave the whole 'saving the pride' thing to someone else."

"But that'd take away most of the fun," Haiba countered. "Come on, Simba. Adventure comes with the job. Or the job comes with the adventure. Either way, you can't deny how thrilling it all is. Would you want to go back to just being normal after all this?"

There was a long moment of silence between the two.

"I don't know," Simba replied honestly. "But..." He got to his paws. "I'm not sure of what to do. I don't know what that girl is going to do to Nala. She could want to... tear out her insides for all I know. I had a weird cousin who tried to do something like that to me once."

"And I thought *my* family was weird," Haiba said. "Look, Simba, I think it's about time that you put that mind of yours to work. You know you can figure this out. Do you love Nala or not?"

"Of course I do!" he exclaimed.

"Then you won't let this happen," Haiba told him. "Come on. You've gotta stop her before she changed the entire kingdom. We don't even know if these changes are reversible or not."

Simba nodded, and got to his paws. Haiba was right. He couldn't just stand by and watch as Nala became the victim of that strange cub. Whatever she was up to, it certainly wasn't good. Someone had to stop her.

And Simba was the right somebody.

"Okay, here's the plan," he announced, striding across the grass with an important mission planted in his head. "We find that cub, sneak up from behind her, and then bash her over the head with a rock!"

Haiba didn't look too impressed. "A rock?"

"Yeah. A rock. You know — a really... *big* rock," Simba replied, rather sheepishly. "Look, so far, it's the best option we've got. Plus it'll keep her creepy eyes closed."

"Fine," Haiba sighed. "We'll bash her over the head with a rock. Not exactly as complex as killing yourself to escape a

dream, but I can deal with it. It still raises the question of what this... girl wants. She must have serious personal issues to want to change the colour of an entire kingdom."

"Yeah, well, I think we've met a lot of—"

Someone pounced right on Simba!

"Nala!"

Nala had pinned Simba to the ground, her eyes wide. "Simba! We've got trouble! *Big*, big trouble!"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," he said, shaking his head. "Slow down, Nala. What's going on? And how did you escape?"

"Weird girl," Nala explained frantically. "Thing inside of her. Needs bodies. Real, *living* bodies!"

"What's living in my thing?" Haiba asked, walking over to see what the commotion was. "And what does it have to do with a girl?"

"I think she means there's something inside of that girl we saw," Simba explained. "What did she say, Nala?"

"/t," Nala corrected. "You mean what *it* said. It's calling itself... Inque."

"Inque?"

"Oh, dear," said Haiba, noticeably worried. "We're in trouble."

AN: Oh, boy. Looks like Haiba knows something that Simba and Nala doesn't. Then again, that always seems to be the case. Loveable oaf. Anyway, you can expect the final chapter in about... thirty-six years. Seems like an appropriate time scale, considering how unresponsive and mean my computer is being to me. I'll try my best. I always come through in the end, don't I?

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Lost Soul

AN: I feel like crying. This story has become such a mess. It stands as a story that's taken over two weeks to finish. I just can't believe it. But – and I mean it this time – the problem has been solved. And now, finally, I can give you the last chapter.

Haradion: Haiba knows many things, and this will certainly not be the last. He's too smart – surprising as it may be.

the-mysterious-other: Yep. Aliens. They are pretty cool. Maybe there'll be more...

Chapter Seven: Lost Soul

Simba and Nala both stared at Haiba, surprised. "You mean you *know* what this thing is?" asked Simba.

"Well... sort of," Haiba admitted.

"What do you mean, 'sort of'?" asked Nala, taking a step towards him. "Please tell me that 'sort of' includes how to stop it."

"Would this be a bad time to reply 'no'?" Haiba responded, looking rather sheepish.

"Look, just tell us what you know," said Simba.

"Well, in the Grand Lands, a lot of stories go around between the lionesses," Haiba explained. "And, well, when you're me, you can't help but squeeze in between them and get in on the action."

"I dread to think what that actually means," Nala muttered, looking aside.

"One of these stories," Haiba continued, "concerns a creature. A creature that attacks prides in the dead of night, and by the morning, changes them completely."

"Changes them blue, purple, pink," remarked Simba. "Pick any colour you like."

"Not quite," said Haiba. "It's like... everyone in the pride forgot who they were. Like they had their souls replaced. It happened occasionally. Every little once in a while. For hundreds of years. And its reputation earned the creature the name of Inque, because of the black, dark mark it left on all those lost prides."

Nala was left looking impressed. "We need to do scary story nights more often," she said. "He'd be great at it."

"Okay, so this Inque thing is either after food, or our souls," Simba concluded, pacing back and forth in front of his two friends.

"Or *both*," Nala added. "Our souls could be its food."

"Good point," Simba agreed. "So it wants our souls because it's hungry. So, how do you kill someone who wants to eat your soul?"

"Easy," said Haiba. "Starve them."

"You've lost me," said Nala. "How do you starve someone who's hungry for... well, *you*?"

"Hide?" suggested Haiba with a shrug. "Okay, so that's a bit cowardly, but then sometimes the best lions are."

"No, no, no," Simba said, shaking his head. He seemed very twitchy and tense. "Look, there's something that doesn't make sense here. That Inque thing has already got the soul of that girl. Why does it need more?"

"Maybe it's weak," Haiba suggested. "After all, no one's reported a sighting of an Inque in more than a hundred years."

"Where does something like that even come from?" Nala wondered curiously. "It sounds so... odd. Like it doesn't even belong here."

"Maybe it doesn't," Haiba mused. "It could be from beyond even the stars themselves. There could be more out there than we'll ever, ever know."

The three cubs stared up at the evening sky. The stars were beginning to lightly twinkle, and it caused the three of them

to wonder if there truly was more out there. But, of course, being confined to this world only, they would never know...

Unless something out there decided to come here.

"My head..." Tara was struggling to find the right words, as she stumbled weakly across another identical field. Everything looked the same. Before she had changed everything. Before the Inque. Before this nightmare had even begun.

Tara realised that it was a nightmare now. A living nightmare. This... this 'Inque', it didn't want to grant her the most sacred of gifts. It merely wanted to use her. To use her body, her mind, her *soul*, to get what it wanted. And what it wanted... was more.

It didn't just end with her. There was something else it wanted. The Inque started was going to start with Tara, and then never ever stop. The shocks in her head. The painful, agonising shocks were part of its plan. It wanted to consume her whole. Turn her into someone far different than who she was.

To anyone else in the world, that would have been good.

"Oh, my head..." It felt like her mind was on fire. Tara collapsed to the ground, unable to take the pain. Her frail, pathetic, young body was weak. Too weak to take in what the Inque was doing to her. She was nothing. It had taken her so long to realise that. No wonder her parents had dumped her. They were right to do it.

The Inque had shown her that. The increased intelligence had enabled her to learn, and make decisions for herself. She knew why her parents had left her to fester in the desert. They hated her. They had done so much for her, but she had done absolutely nothing in return.

"Inque..." she murmured, tears streaming down her face. "What have you done to me?"

She had cried so much in such a short time that a puddle of tears was splayed out on the grass in front of her face. Tara saw her reflection staring back at her. That face. Her face. Her face full of... *nothing*.

"*I have shown you... yourself,*" the Inque informed her. If it had a face, then she could picture it smiling gleefully at her. "*Everything that you are – which is nothing.*"

"I know," Tara agreed, trembling with the truth injected into her soul. "And it's breaking my heart. Please..." She winced, the sadness actually hurting her. "Help me."

"No, Tara," said the Inque. "*You are beyond help.*"

Tara couldn't understand it. "Why... why not?"

"*You are... too affected,*" the Inque told her. "*Your new mind – the mind I have formed for you – is too strong for your body to handle. So many emotions. All at once. They hurt, do they not?*"

"So much," Tara replied, pushing her face into the puddle of sadness below her. "So... very... much. I can't take it."

"Exactly," the Inque said. "*And this is where we come to the end of our partnership together. The final cause.*"

Tara registered that the Inque was no longer pausing when it spoke. It had become the smartest it could possibly be. "And what is this... cause?"

"You," said the Inque. "*You are the final cause of this, Tara. And you always have been. Ever since I implanted myself in your brain. After realising what you are – after realising the truth – you must now surrender yourself to me.*"

Tara's eyes went dry. "Yes," she said, agreeing wholeheartedly. "My life is just pain. You... deserve to... consume me."

"Good, Tara," the Inque said, sounding pleased. "*You have learnt well from the time we have spent together. Now rise. Rise so that I can cleanse you of nothingness. Rise so that I can take you out of the dark. Rise, Tara.*"

Tara did as she was told, almost hypnotically, rising to her paws and staring straight ahead. A light, faint breeze ruffled her fur slightly. She had such a knowing look on her face. She had realised her place in the universe.

And it was tiny.

Tara stood there. Ready to surrender what little life she had to the Inque. It deserved that, at least.

She tensed slightly, waiting for her soul to be cleansed.

"Wait!"

Tara glanced aside, and saw a random cub standing beside her. He looked like he had something very urgent to say.

"Whatever you're doing..." he said, slowly and distinctly, "I don't think you want to do it just yet."

Two more cubs appeared from behind him. One was female. The other was rather handsome, she had to admit.

"Leave me be," she said, averting her gaze so she was staring across the horizon. "I need... I... I need..."

She sobbed, forcing back the sadness. "I don't know what I need."

"She's gone mad," said the handsome cub, stepping forward. "The Inque's been messing with her head. She's got no idea who or what she is anymore."

"She looks so sad," noticed the female. "What's wrong?"

"Everything," Tara replied, closing her eyes. "Everything is wrong. I don't know what to do anymore. This... this thing. Inside my head. It's... changing me. Changing everything that I am."

Simba, Nala and Haiba were both confused and concerned. It was as if this poor, tortured cub was fighting a war inside of her. Like a thousand souls raging around all at once, fighting to be noticed. This Inque creature was much, *much* more than just deadly.

The Inque began to whisper inside of Tara's head again. "*Tara, you shall not resist,*" it said threateningly. "*You will surrender yourself to me.*"

Shaking and cowering, Tara let out a painful cry. She was trying, trying so hard to fight back against this horrible thing that had invaded her life. She wanted it gone. She wanted it dead.

"It's trying to take her," Haiba said, pointing to Tara with a claw. "It's trying to take her soul."

"Oh, my gosh," said Nala, horrified. She didn't want to see this, but she felt as if she couldn't look away. Like she was compelled to witness this awful event.

"No!" Tara screamed, staring up at the sky. "*No! I defy you! You won't take me! You won't! You won't, you won't, you won't!*" She was hysterical, crying and screaming all at once.

The Inque was unaffected. It sounded calm. "*I will, Tara,*" it informed her. "*You will die... and I shall live.*"

Zap!

Tara gasped as a painful shock – the most painful of them all – tore through her body, causing her to feel as if she were burning all over. Everything inside had been set alight.

The Inque was removing her life.

Tara, screamed, and screamed and screamed, but this did nothing to stop the pain. It just continued. Got worse, even.

And then...

Silence.

Tara – or, what had now taken over her body – stood rigid, eyes glowing green. It looked like her soul had been completely drained.

It had.

"*The Inque...*" she spoke, in a deep, menacing voice, "*has risen.*"

"What's happened?" Nala asked. "Has it taken over her mind or something?"

"No," Haiba replied. "A lot more than that. It's taken her life. That cub, whoever she was, doesn't exist anymore. The Inque has replaced her with itself."

Nala was aghast. "That's horrible."

Simba was staring hard at the thing. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"*I want you,*" the Inque replied, taking a step forward as it adjusted easily to Tara's body. But now, it was no longer Tara's body.

It belonged to the Inque.

"*All of you,*" the Inque said, pointing to them all with a claw. "*I will take your souls. I will feed on your lives.*"

"How could you do that to her?" Simba asked, both horrified and angry. "She was scared."

"*She was nothing,*" the Inque retorted. "*And now I have made use of that. Using this body, I will spread myself throughout this whole earth. Taking every mind and soul as I go along, until I am all. I shall be anyone and everyone. The essence of life itself.*"

"It can't do that, can it?" Nala asked.

"I think it *can*," said Haiba. "We don't know anything about it. It could... do anything – probably."

"*None of you will exist,*" the Inque continued, stepping towards them. "*I will replace you, and take everything that you are.*"

"This is sick," said Nala, backing away. "How do you stop it? Come on, Haiba! What have you heard from those stories?"

"I – I – I don't know," he stammered, shaking his head. "It just said what it did, not how to stop it."

"*There is nothing that can be done,*" the Inque said. "*Now stand still, and accept your inevitable fate.*"

It let out an evil chuckle that chilled the three cubs to the core. The Inque was now unstoppable.

"No!"

That cry came from Tara's body, but this time, it was not the Inque that was speaking. "You... won't... take... me..."

Tara's body, or the Inque's – no one knew what to call it anymore – jolted backwards, as if winded. "*Tara?*" This time, the Inque spoke. "*But you're...*"

Simba, Nala and Haiba looked at each other in surprise. It was arguing with itself!

"I said... you *won't*..." Tara's voice came through defiantly. "You... *won't*... take... *me*..."

"*You will die,*" the Inque stated, jolting again. "*You will obey me. Accept my instructions. You will obey me!*"

"No."

"What?"

"I said no."

"*What is the meaning of this?*"

"It means no," said Tara, fighting back. "If I am going to die, Inque, then you will die with me."

The nameless body was on the ground now, writhing in agony. "*I will not die! I cannot die! I shall live for ever! For ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever...*"

Tara rose to her paws, having regained control of her body. She was straining to maintain it.

"Shut... up... you... *prep!*"

And then she exploded.

Well, that's what Simba, Nala and Haiba thought at first. But then they saw that her stomach had blown wide open. A trail of her innards was leaking out onto the ground, streaked with dying black strands of gooey liquid.

The three cubs were covered in her guts.

"Oh... *gosh!*" Nala cried in horror, shaking frantically to try and get rid of the blood and entrails stuck to her fur.

"Oh, man!" Haiba cried, wiping a fragment of intestine from his muzzle. "That is the second most disgusting thing I've ever had in my mouth!"

Simba was fiddling around in his mouth. "I think I've just swallowed something..."

"You sure it wasn't her kidney?" Haiba asked.

"Yeah, I think it was her kidney." He glanced around. "I never thought I'd say this, but I want a bath."

"All right, last one to the water hole is... covered in blood," Nala said, before dashing off as fast as she could.

It didn't take long for Simba and Haiba to catch up.

Simba, Nala and Haiba were sat on the edge of the water hole, having finally cleaned all traces of Tara from their bodies.

"I can see why they go for the throat," said Nala. "Surprisingly, it's less of a mess. Ooh – that rhymes."

"What happened to her?" Simba wondered. "I mean, was it really *that* bad enough to cause her stomach to explode all over us?"

"Big fight inside," Haiba explained, patting his own stomach. "Between Tara and the Inque. When she won, well..." He shrugged. "Her body was far too weak to even sustain anything. And—"

"—it caused her to blow up," Nala finished for him. "I think we got that, thanks."

"She must have been pretty strong to fight back," said Haiba. "Her parents should be proud."

"Yeah," Nala agreed, nodding. "I'm sure they are..."

"Okay, so if I had a mango, and you had a mango, then how many mangos would there be altogether?" Zazu asked.

"Two," Pori answered.

"At last!" Zazu exclaimed, pointing to Pori with both wings. "You've learnt the basics of addition!"

"And then, if we ate both of them, then there'd be none," she said, smiling. "Isn't that right, Zabrak?"

"Precisely!" agreed Zazu. "Oh, you're doing so well, Pori. I'm sure we'll be making the greatest progress in the weeks to come."

"Whatever that means," said Pori, turning away from him. "Hey, Zathura, I think that you were wrong."

"Wrong about what?"

"I don't think it would be so cool to control the world," Pori told him. "After all, if you had everything that you wanted, then what would be left to get? I mean, it would get pretty boring."

"I suppose so," Zazu agreed, standing beside her. He stared up at the night sky, and the billions of the stars in it. "Too much of a good thing. It could turn you into a monster. You'd leave a dark mark behind. On everything you once were."

"Like an Inque?" asked Pori. "I hear they're pretty nasty."

Zazu shook his head. He didn't know what the hornbill was talking about. "Whatever you say," he said. "Whatever you say..."

The End

AN: Aww. That was kind of sad, wasn't it? I would say "poor Tara", but it isn't very clear whether she was really good or not. I'll leave that for you, the lovely fans, to deliberate on. I do love a good bit of discussion.

I'm sure you've all been waiting for the next story. Why not read this little teaser?

NEXT TIME: A series of murders occur close to the Pride Lands. Their only connection? The bodies are smoking. Simba, Nala and Haiba investigate, and discover an old enemy lurking in the shadows...